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ABSTRACT

The use of the term "Creole" to refer to the Haitian language is discussed, and it is argued that "Haitian" is a more appropriate term. Psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic functions of the term are examined, including its etymological and usage history and images associated with its application in a variety of locations and cultural contexts around the world. The debate over whether Creole is a non-standard dialect of another, usually dominant European language or is a language in and of itself is examined briefly, and further formal analysis of the non-European origins of Creoles is recommended. Haitian Creole is seen as belonging to a family of Afro-centric Creole languages deserving of further study, rather than as a "poor relative" of French. It is proposed that linguistically, the most consistent approach is to view the modern indigenous language of Haiti as Haitian, having a status as a language equal to that of common European languages. Official acceptance of this status and terminology, including an amendment to the constitution, and its incorporation into the educational system are urged. (MSE)

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What's in a Name :

An Awakening of the Haitian Linguistic Consciousness

(An Argument for Haitian as the Native Language of Haitians)

BY

JEAN PREVILLON

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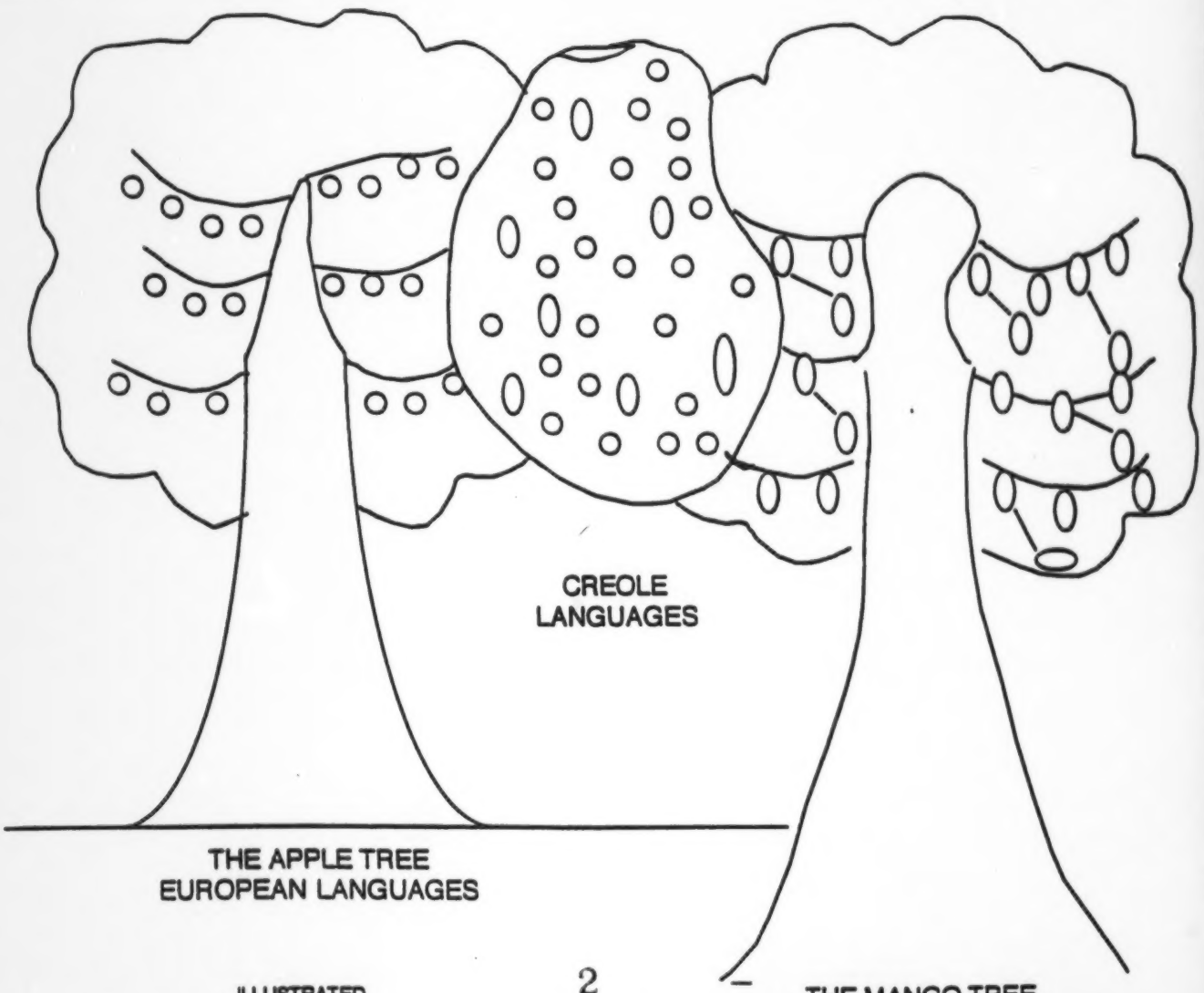

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Jean Previllon

Language is considered an element so central to the identity of a person that it is indeed wise to explain, clarify, preface any activity that relates to its modification. Therefore, I would like, at the outset, at least to disclaim whatever I intuitively feel, may be misinterpreted by the reader/listener; and, at the same breath, share what underlying purpose I have in mind when I accept this challenge.

Accordingly, let it be known that the underlying purpose of this presentation is not to eliminate the word 'Creole'; but rather to recommend that we use it in its functionally logical place so as to enthrone it. The sovereign authority invested in the word 'Creole' will, as a result, strengthen our linguistic identity. In other words, if it can be contended that we Haitians speak Haitian, it will, either in the near future or eventually, be both psychologically and logically compelling to develop all academic areas in Haitian as opposed to the current and lingering "no material" justifications often heard of educators and the public in general. Also, if we speak Haitian, it will be both psychologically and logically compelling to encourage the maintenance of academic subjects at home in Haitian as opposed to requiring a sudden switch from Haitian to French at a certain academic level. Logic dictates that if Italians speak Italian, Spanish speak Spanish, Russians speak Russian, then Haitians speak Haitian.

The naming of anything may be used as an act to designate something. As there may not be real synonyms, the new name is bound to represent new and distinct characteristics. This characterization then, by way of definition, becomes the references which impacts on someone's imagination as the name

or reference is used. Whether or not the name will generate a positive or negative image in someone's mind will depend on the extent to which the person sympathizes or empathizes with the situation at hand. Again the name or reference may bring pleasure or displeasure to the person should he have the opportunity to experience the situation or to witness the reaction of authority figures toward that situation.

Accordingly, any designation which generates pleasure within a community is promoted while, in contrast, any designation which generates displeasure is discouraged. In fact, the natural tendency is to gravitate toward the pleasure-bearing names very decisively as one wants to stay away from derisive names.

For example, while words such as 'patriot', 'classic', 'religious', 'winner', bring pride and pleasure and draw a lot of fans, other words as 'alien', 'primitive', 'atheist', 'loser', bring humiliation and displeasure and repel anyone to whom they are assigned. It is obvious that both the feeling of pride and of humiliation are due to one's experience either in living or in witnessing the consequence or the treatment of those who were designated by such words or names. Thus, inspired by the great 16th century English poet William Shakespeare, one may rhetorically ask, "What's in a name?" In view of the above discussion, the answer to his question certainly cannot be that of Samuel T. Coleridge, a 19h century English poet, who had a unique definition for the word 'name'. So unique is his definition that it is used to open a chapter on personal and family names. 'What are names but air? he said boldly(Pei 1984). Without any linguistically sophisticated pretense, a lay person may

simply perceive or recall in a name the image or the reference carried by the definition of that name and the reaction or the treatment engendered by the definition assigned to that name. Therefore one can surmise that the act of naming, at the outset, predetermines, purposely or not, the eventually attitudes and/or treatment. Further, one can easily realize how both the attitudes and the treatment can be justified by those who decide to follow the expert providers of such names, definitions. As a matter of fact, since these designations and definitions come from "expert" analysis, most laymen comply with them without seriously analyzing both the psycholinguistic and the sociolinguistic impact made by these names, definitions, images on their psyche.

Undoubtedly, the act of naming carries with it a definition which is sometimes used imaginatively if not creatively, by linguists to influence the mind of the layman. As a result of this expert psychological influence, the layman finds himself/herself blindly nurturing an attitude toward the name and toward anyone who may be associated with it. This process represents in part not the eventual fate, but rather the many episodes experienced by the word 'creole' for the past three centuries.

What is 'creole'? Does one write this word with a capital or lower case 'c'? Should the letter 'e' in the first syllable take an accent? How many syllables does this word have? How does one pronounce it? As was stated in the introduction of this position paper, the discussion about 'creole' will not be centered in complex areas of linguistics. Instead, comments will be concentrated on the very first question that invites us to determine what

'creole' is. These comments will rely mostly on the sociolinguistic and the psycholinguistic functions of the word 'creole' as it relates to the international world in general and to the Haitian psyche in particular.

The word 'creole' has for the past three centuries undergone many sociological changes and as a result, has engendered many sociolinguistic attitudes. Its etymology suggests that it carried two functions during the Sixteenth Century Portugal. Originated as 'crioulo' in Portuguese, the word on the one hand, connoted the verb 'criar' which means to nurse, to breed, to nourish; on the other hand, the word 'crioulo' also meant white persons born in the Portuguese colonies brought to Europe for housework (Mühlaüsler 1986).

It is obvious that whether the word 'crioulo' was used as a verb or as a noun, both functions created a patronizing attitudes in the mind and in the actions of continental Europeans, while the same word at the same instant generated a subservient demeanor in the psyche of the creoles. Though one has to keep in mind that the subservient demeanor was officially obliterated by the bravery of some indentured laborers of European descent and by African slaves who were to eventually inherit the same designation, the negative connotations still linger. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, a sophisticated source of knowledge, provides detailed information regarding the sociological use of 'Creole'. So detailed is the information relating to the images projected by the term 'creole' that one becomes curious to know how this word changes meaning as it travels from Europe to various nations of the

Western Hemisphere. The following chart represents the synthesis of different images throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Place	Images Projected by the Word 'Creole'
Louisiana	European descendants
Spanish America	Oppressed and dissenting people
Mexico	'Nouveau riche' and co-oppressors
West Indies	Happy and easy going people
French Guiana	People with European life styles
Surinam	Descendants of African slaves

The two sets of the originated Portuguese sociological functions of the word 'creole clearly demonstrate that, except in Louisiana and in French Guiana, the word symbolizes a negative image on every count. In other words, because of the negative connotations generated by 'creole', one could infer that anyone associated with the word would also experience negative treatment. It is easy then to imagine how people, as a result of being treated so badly, would lose their self-esteem.

In the same way, if one looks at the word 'creole' in a sociolinguistic mode, one may discover that, as a means of communication, 'creole' at the start occupied a very low status among some linguists. Insofar as a fully recognized language was concerned, 'creole' could not be considered. For Stewart (1962 in Mühlhaüsler 1986) the well known linguist, did not think that 'creole' had met

autonomy, 'creole' is almost as deficient as pidgin (i.e. a simplified mixture of words made from the meeting of two languages to use as communication for trade purposes). The only differences Stewart could see between pidgin and 'creole' is that while 'Creole' has vitality (i.e. it survives the next generation), pidgin does not.

Stewart's presumption of the worthlessness of 'Creole', and by extension, of the speakers of Creole was indirectly challenged by Trudgill (1983). While disagreeing with linguists who assume that speakers of dialects are lazy and lack intelligence Trudgill asserts: "There is nothing at all inherent in non-standard varieties [of dialects] which makes them inferior." Relating the impact of society's perception on speakers of non-standard dialects, Trudgill continues: "... attitudes towards non-standard dialects are attitudes which reflect the social structure of society." (p.20).

While avoiding indulgence into linguistic complexities of language development one cannot avoid noticing that Trudgill's attempt to elevate the status of dialects is in agreement with Bickerton's position on language development. In his article entitled "Creole Languages", Bickerton (1983) maintains that " ... what is common to creole languages may indeed form the basis of the acquisition of language by children everywhere." In other words, contrary to Stewart's assertion that a creole is a non-standard form of language, Bickerton's persuasive argument that all children acquire their native language in the same manner that a creole speaker acquires a creole language would support the notion that the grammatical features of a creole

are standard and uniform for all languages in their stages of development. In short, Bickerton's arguments would suggest that all modern languages possess a creole base.(p. 116).

Bickerton's support of 'Creole' is certainly a powerful step forward in advancing its status. However, the most important contributions of Bickerton in the world of Creole languages is in his inventory of Creole languages. His research has enlightened so many Creole language speakers. It is interesting to surmise that prior to Bickerton's contribution, each Creole language speaker conceivably imagined that Creole was the "low status" language spoken uniquely and exclusively in his/her community. Clearly, we can accept today that creole is a world-wide phenomenon extending far beyond the Caribbean.

As a matter of fact, The New York Public Library Desk Reference (1989), without referring to a language as 'official' or otherwise, introduces to researchers and the world at large, the linguistic members and the potential linguistic members of the new Creole language family. The following table contains some examples indicating the country and the corresponding European 'dominant' language and in this case, the same terminolgy representing the non-European indigenous language of the country.

Country	European Language	Non-European Language
Guinea-Bissau	Portuguese	Criolo
Haiti	French	Creole
Jamaica	English	Creole

Therefore, and most importantly, Bickerton's discovery does not only enlighten one insofar as it documents the multitude of Creole languages in the world; his findings advance linguistic scholarship by attesting to Creole as the designation for a new family of world languages which have emerged in the last 300 years. Let all linguists and laymen celebrate and welcome the additional family of languages which can logically be called Creole.

As was done in the Indo-European language families, such as Germanic, Hellenic, Italic, Latin or Romance, Celtic, etc., the invitation and the challenge remain in effect for linguists to conduct careful research leading to the non-European roots of Creole languages. Also, any review of Bickerton's inventory of the new Creole Language family reveals that the development of these Creole languages happened as a result of a European and a non-European encounter under conditions of servitude or indentured labor. Therefore, the new Creole language family may be said to consist of speakers who had limited social and, in particular, lexical contact with Europeans, but whose indigenous and deep-rooted linguistic legacy is essentially non-European.

These non-European linguistic groups, especially the creole language of the West Indies, have a legitimate vested interest to discover and claim their rightful linguistic roots. Just as the history of the European language family has been well documented, it is similarly essential to explore an Afro-centric approach in order to finally be able to analyze the family of Creole languages from a nativist stand point, which is highly essential and correct. It is after all conceivable that, in the process of searching for Indo-European roots, linguists concentrated on the languages of people living between India and

Europe. However, if one wants to be completely accurate about languages with Afro-centric structures, it would be wise and just to start analyzing those new languages from their roots.(Granger 1987).

Next to the realization of the existence of this new Creole language family, is the fact that, as a result of Bickerton's discovery of a world full of 'Creoles', the word 'creole' must be examined. If we examine for example, two language families, such as Germanic and Italic, we realize that there need not be any apology when one has to call the name of the languages. Also, except for a few countries, whose historical development may explain their current linguistic definition and status, most languages in the world are named after the nationalities of the people who speak them. The English speak English; French speak French; Italians speak Italian. Therefore, the recommendation is to reconsider the members of this new Creole language family and to logically name them in accordance with the nationality of the people who speak these languages.

From a linguistically consistent viewpoint, therefore, the indigenous language of modern Haiti is Haitian, which is a member of the world family of languages called Creole. This observation elevates Haitian from the status of adjective (a qualifier) to that of noun (a substantive). By giving Haitian an independent status, we bring it fully into the family of official languages such as English, German, French, and Spanish.

The first thought which may come to mind as a concern to be expressed by some Haitian compatriots may be the technicalities involved in implementing this change in Haiti itself. Well, let it be said at the outset that

the change will take place in Haiti if and whenever the following considerations take place: a) there is a clear awareness of the existence the world's Creole languages; b) there is an objective discussion of Creole at the Ministry of Education related to the confusion which the word "creole" creates among the Creole language speakers in the diaspora, especially in the United States, the meeting place of practically most of the Creole speakers, and c) if there is an amendment to the Haitian Constitution. Thus, in an effort to be realistic, one has to be hopeful that this recommendation will be considered and complied with as soon as it is convenient to the appropriate authorities in Haiti.

However, educators, as well as Haitian compatriots who are concerned about having at least one single and basic linguistic identity cannot wait for this change to take place in Haiti in order to start using the word **Haitian** when identifying and affirming their linguistic identity in the English language. Logic dictates that if Italians speak Italian, Spanish speak Spanish, Russians speak Russian, then Haitians speak Haitian.

The American Heritage Dictionary (1992), has already taken the lead in recognizing Haiti's recommended official Language. It has, however, fallen short of giving honor to the new Creole language family. Following are the Dictionary's definitions and the much needed modification that is a recommendation of this position paper.

Jean Previllon

DICTIONARY'S

Haitian adj. Of or relating to Haiti or its people or its people or culture. **Haitian** n.1. A native or inhabitant of Haiti. 2. Haitian Creole

Haitian Creole n. A language spoken by the majority of Haitians, based on French and various African languages.

RECOMMENDED

Haitian adj. Of or relating to Haiti or its people or culture. **Haitian** n. 1. A native or inhabitant of Haiti. 2. **THE LANGUAGE OF HAITI,** Creole language (See Creolized languages).

We Haitians have come a long way in our efforts to improve our status whether we are at home or abroad. For those of us residing out of Haiti, there is even a greater need to double the efforts in order to overcome the various pressures of society at large. In Western society where the individual is rewarded for his/her assertiveness, we Haitians need to build upon our self-esteem and collective identity. Naming our language Haitian is in itself an initiative that not only promotes our first nationality, but also strengthens our individual community ties.

Further, by relegating the word Creole to a family of languages, the speakers of Haitian are better able to appreciate their distinctive linguistic contribution to the world, to recognize their membership in the family of world languages, and to proudly acknowledge Creole as a family of language with equal ranking to other language families such as Germanic, Italic, Celtic, etc. As our illustrious linguist, Dejean (1980), dramatically opens his pioneering text: **Comment écrire le créole d'Haiti** by affirming: "Les

créolophones, voila mon souci (The Creole speakers are my concerns,)" (p.9), our appreciation of this affirmation compels us to lift the torch a little higher. At this height, it is our hope that the flame emanating from this torch reaches as many Creole languages as possible throughout the non-European world.

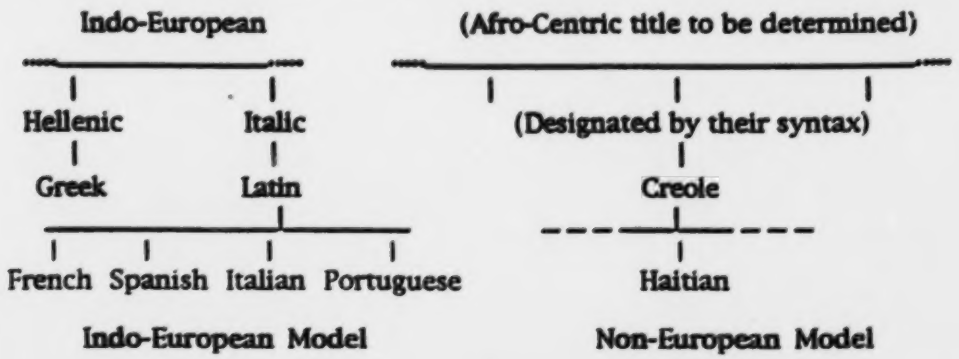
In other words, as was done for practically almost all languages of the world (for the Romance languages, read Pei 1984, pages 44-47.), let the tribulations, the heroic feasts, the pride, the courage, the dreams, the resolutions of our forefathers/foremothers be synthesized and concretized in one conceptually prideful word: **Haitian**, to be used for our first language, our first culture, and our first nationally. It is indeed a new and an evolutionary idea; but, let's face it, genuinely and honestly speaking, what's the purpose of education? Well, the purpose of education may be as endless as the imagination and the creativity of educators. This recommendation then, if adopted, will empower the Haitian collective mind and psyche so as to command and generate positive energies and attitudes among us first, then throughout the world.

Therefore, while we are anxiously waiting for the visionary mind to start legal procedures in Haiti in order to innovatively, accordingly, and officially reconsider, let us in the diaspora espouse the logic of our Afro-Centric heritage and the designation **Haitian** whenever we refer to the language of Haitians in the English language. By no stretch of imagination will this leading initiative eliminate internal subjugation of the unschooled

citizenry; however, in addition to being a catalyst which would help psychologically bring all social classes closer together, this decision would systematically constitute at least a symbolic recognition of all other members of the Creole language family, our West Indians cousins being on top of the list. What an empirical and sincere way to give meaning to the traditional yearly celebration of "Jounen Entènasyonal Kreyòl" (Creole's International Day)! For, not only will this day recognize Creole languages with French lexifiers, but also, very importantly, and very correctly, this Creole International Day will honor all Creole languages of the world.

In addition and as a matter of fact, should linguists, whether conservative, liberal, or progressive, honor the invitation to research the Afro-Centric roots of Creole language, their finding should uncover our West Indian African linguistic connection. Hence, our appellation "(West Indian) brother" which we have been declaiming so enthusiastically, will reveal a family relationship much more closer than what was learned through a Euro-centric viewpoint.

The following model adopted from the Indo-European languages diagram indicated in the 1979 Webster Dictionary will illustrate the point.



It is obvious that Creole languages are not accounted for in the Indo-European model above. As per the Encyclopedia Britannica, the evolution of Creole is seen as follows.

> At first, a simplified or otherwise modified form of the language of the dominant group comes to be used for communication between members of the different groups. At this first stage the communicating language is a lingua franca and, if simplified in its forms, a pidgin. When the lingua franca becomes the standard or native language of a community, usually of the less dominant group, the language has become a creole. (p. 233).

Thus, for the West Indian Creoles, for instance, if by sympathy the Creole languages, the language of the non-European, were to be indicated anywhere on the Indo-European model above, they would have to be the bases of the dominant languages "who gave them birth," as per to the common definition of the cited authoritative source above. This argument, for the Haitian, would demean "Creole" to an even lower sociopolitical status. For example, one would have a difficult time, logically speaking, to justify the current status of the term "Haitian Creole". Since Haitian Creole is made up of mostly French vocabularies or lexifiers, if one were to gullibly accept the common definition cited above, the language spoken by Haitians then would have been the currently emotionally charged non-sequitur French Creole. This emotion however, happens to be justified with the view point of some linguists. Mühlhaüsler, agreeing with other linguists, asserts " '... we will avoid calling the creoles "English-based" etc., since we can see no grounds for deciding that the lexicon is the base of language, as opposed to the semantic-syntactic framework of the language ' " (p.5). Updated information such as these clearly

support our position that the language of the Haitians, in spite of its French based lexifiers should be designated Haitian.

Finally, as a result of having been exposed to updated information, we, Haitian advocates, find it essential to empower our compatriots, whether they are in Haiti or abroad. An enlightened Haitian also recognizes that being a member of the family of Creole languages, he/she, as a speaker of Haitian, belongs to the diaspora of all the peoples of the world whose linguistic ancestry is superficially European but indigenously non-European.

As change agents, we educators bear the noble responsibility of freeing the human mind. Decisively using the word Haitian as the language of the Haitians, not only gives deserved recognition to the new family of Creole world languages, but also ultimately liberates our non-European linguistic cousins throughout the world who share a common linguistic heritage. What's in a name with regards to Haitian? In the term Haitian, used as a noun, instead of an adjective, the proud collective psyche receives ample opportunity to surface with a new and resounding consciousness that is highly liberating and rewarding. It is the awakening of a people from their deep and troubled sleep of indentured status. To free the mind is to liberate the soul and give it wings. How high it will soar depends greatly on our willingness to espouse the thought.

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